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STATEMENT OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION AND SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MAYOR'S PANEL ON DECENTRALIZATION.

NEW YORK CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION, BROOKLYN, N.Y.

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NOTING THE NEED TO DEVELOP CITYWIDE PLANS FOR DEALING WITH THE COMPLEX PROBLEMS OF HOUSING, EMPLOYMENT, WELFARE, AND OTHER CITY SERVICES, AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH EDUCATIONAL EFFORTS, THE NEW YORK CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION STATES ITS DISAGREEMENT WITH THE REPORT OF THE MAYOR'S PANEL ON SCHOOL DECENTRALIZATION, THE SO-CALLED BUNDY REPORT. THE BOARD'S MAJOR OBJECTIONS ARE WITH THE METHODS AND TIMETABLE FOR DECENTRALIZATION PROPOSED BY THE BUNDY PANEL. THE BOARD FEELS THAT THE BUNDY PLAN WOULD TOO RAPIDLY ASSIGN EDUCATIONAL AUTHORITY TO THE LOCAL BOARDS AND GIVE THEM SWEEPING POWERS OVER (1) THE HIRING OF PERSONNEL, (2) CURRICULUM, (3) EXPENDITURES, AND (4) EDUCATIONAL POLICIES. ALTHOUGH IT FAVORS DECENTRALIZATION, THE BOARD MAINTAINS THAT STATE LAW LIMITS HOW FAR AUTHORITY MAY BE DELEGATED. ITS OTHER OBJECTIONS TO THE PLAN CONCERN THE PROPOSED DRASTIC ALTERATIONS IN PERSONNEL PROCEDURES AND THE OPERATIONAL DIFFICULTIES OF WHAT IT FEELS WOULD BE TWO PARALLEL SCHOOL SYSTEMS. IT ALSO CRITICIZES THE DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY OVER SPECIAL CLASSES, OPTIONAL SERVICES, AND COSTS OUTLINED IN THE PLAN. THE BOARD FEELS THAT THE PLAN DOES NOT GIVE THE CENTRAL AGENCY CLEARCUT PROCEDURES FOR ACCOUNTABILITY OVER THE LOCAL BOARDS. IT RECOMMENDS A SLOWER, MORE DELIBERATIVE MOVEMENT TOWARD DECENTRALIZATION, WITH SUFFICIENT TIME ALLOWED TO EVALUATE THE SUCCESS OF THE PLAN. (NH)

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CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT **CITY OF NEW YORK**

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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Statement of the Board of Education and Superintendent of Schools

On the Recommendations Of the Mayor's Panel On Decentralization

The State Legislature early this year adopted a bill which requires the Mayor of the City of New York to propose to the Legislature by December 1, 1967, a plan for "the creation and development of educational policy and administrative units within the school district of the City of New York with adequate authority to foster greater community initiative and participation" in the city's schools.

In pursuance of this charge, the Mayor appointed an advisory panel under the chairmanship of McGeorge Bundy. The panel submitted its advisory report to the Mayor on November 8. The report was set forth fully in the press and is receiving extensive coverage. Moreover, it is being distributed widely by the panel.

The following is the full text of a statement issued by the Board of Education on November 9, which discusses in broad terms the Board's reactions and concerns with certain aspects of the report.

The panel's report to the Mayor describes and dramatizes the necessity for increased community activity and participation in educational affairs, as well as the need for greater decentralization of the school system. In so doing, the report makes an important contribution, and the Board welcomes it, since the panel's goals are identical with our own. Our Board shares much of the analysis of the problem and some of the conclusions of the panel. We favor constructive change.

Such differences as we may have with the panel's report relate to the methodology and timetable of some of the changes that are being recommended to the Mayor. The nature of the problem or the mandate of the Legislature, in our opinion, does not call for the elimination of the present school system and the substitution of many full-blown new school systems in order to achieve our common objectives.

Our educational and social problems are heavy. Too many of our children in the low income neighborhoods do not learn the basic skills adequately. Parents look to schools as the primary instrumentality to achieve aspirations for their children. Frustrations and inequities in industrial and social spheres contribute to resentment of inequalities in our schools. Yet, the school system cannot alone fill all the needs. The fact is that educational efforts are weakened because of the inadequacies of other governmental actions, especially in the fields of housing, employment, welfare, sanitation and recreation.

Special Efforts Stressed

The Board of Education has repeatedly emphasized the interrelationships of these fields with education, and the urgency of comprehensive city-wide plans for coping with the ravages of discrimination and poverty which vitally affect the efforts of the schools to provide quality education for all students. The existence of a single city school system has permitted the Board, within its own area of competence, to so employ its resources as to permit the greatest aid in the areas of greatest need. We fear that the creation of many autonomous school systems will make such needed special efforts more difficult.

The panel properly invites and anticipates a lively debate on its recommen-

dations so that the final recommendations which will be made by the Mayor to the Legislature on December 1st may reflect the best possible judgment and constructive comment of citizens who are united in their quest for the best educational system possible for all of our children. Our unpaid Board of Education—which is a state agency under the supervision of the Board of Regents—wishes to assist in that dialogue.

Accordingly, some of the views previously presented to the panel by the Board President are being presented to the Mayor and the public. They constitute the best and unanimous judgment of all the Members of the Board of Education, who represent different ethnic, religious and professional backgrounds, and who have had years of experience with the social, economic, governmental and educational forces that affect our school system. We offer the more basic comments now in the effort to strengthen whatever plan may be submitted by the Mayor to the Legislature. We do not here discuss the many favorable features of the plan with which we agree.

I. THE DANGERS OF WHOLESALE SHIFTING OF EDUCATIONAL POWERS

The basic recommendation of the panel is that there be created at one stroke a whole new school system for the City of New York, with power divided between a new central agency and new community school boards elected by untried methods with sweeping powers over (1) the hiring of all personnel, (2) curriculum, (3) expenditures and (4) educational policies. In each of these four areas, the panel would leave no room for orderly transition. Rather, it proceeds, by a single act, to establish new and untried procedures, with grave risks to children, parents and teachers if things should not work out as planned. We believe in social planning; however, it must be blended with practical experience. For example, new school districts, up to 60, are to be created in place of the present ones, thus abolishing all of the existing local school boards with the wealth of experience and knowledge which they have acquired. In their place, new boards will be elected in an untested manner and will receive great powers.

Furthermore, division of authority over different schools and services as between the new school districts, the central agency and the Mayor would result in serious educational problems, with inevitable confusion of authority and many duplications of staff and costs. Such difficulties may, of course, be overcome or mitigated with time. However, the rigidity of the division and the absence of room for experimentation and adaptation appears to be an unwise and unduly precipitate step.

Thus, the strong difference that the Board of Education has with the panel is with its desire to go all the distance in one fell swoop by untried methods. These objectives could be achieved more rapidly and in a more orderly fashion if the Board of Education had new legislative powers which would permit it to delegate responsibilities to community boards in areas such as personnel, budget, etc. Such a procedure would enable decentralization to proceed more effectively on the basis of actual experience.

Committed to Area Involvement

The present Board of Education has been firmly committed to the principle of increased community involvement and decentralization. The panel's report summarizes a number of the measures taken in the last few years. This has been done on a step-by-step basis in fullest consultation with the local school boards and after successive meetings with them. At these meetings, the major thrust of the desires of most local school boards and community groups was for increased voice and power, but not the full-blown, autonomous, fragmented, parallel school districts which are here recommended. The fact is that our Board has proceeded with decentralization virtually as far as the limits of the state education law now permit. For example:

a. The education law specifies that local school boards shall be "advisory" only. Our Board has delegated to them maximum consultation functions in the local districts in the areas of budget, personnel, curriculum, zoning, purchase of books and supplies, and community education. Under the law, there is reserved to the central Board the final authority. However, our Board would welcome a change in the law which would permit an orderly delegation of more effective powers to community school boards.

b. Under the law, the Board must appoint the district superintendents, with nominations being made by the Superintendent of Schools. Here, too, we have proceeded with decentralization as far as we are permitted to. We have provided for mutual consultation between the local school boards and the Superintendent of Schools in connection with the choice of district superintendents, and have permitted initiation of choices by local school boards. We would welcome a change which would permit the central agency to delegate to local school boards the selection and appointment, subject to minimum state standards, of district superintendents without further action either by the Superintendent or the central agency.

In Position to Decentralize

With such powers, our Board would be in a position to decentralize the system, make needed changes, take experimental steps which can be evaluated by the Commissioner of Education, and maintain that relationship and prestige with the local boards which will permit both efficient operation and the adherence to standards set by the Board of Education.

It should be borne in mind that in establishing local school boards, it was the Board, not the Legislature, that provided for selections to be made by panels composed one-half of parent representatives and one-half of community representatives. In all but two or three instances, the Board has accepted these recommendations. In general, this procedure has worked well. The Board is now experimenting with other methods of increased local involvement, including parent voting. Although, under present law, actual appointments must still be made by the Board, the Board would welcome a change which would authorize the Board to provide for the final selection of local school boards by the local districts themselves.

II. PERSONNEL

Under the panel's proposals, all existing district superintendents and principals could be unseated at one stroke and new supervisory personnel appointed by the new and untried district boards. Moreover, the power of the locally elected boards to appoint teachers and others and to determine tenure could, in our opinion, be a backward step of the gravest sort, opening the door to personal and politically motivated appointments on a large scale.

Our Board would favor legislation which would enable it to authorize local school boards to hire community superintendents on a contract basis in an effort to assure reasonable accountability. However, it disagrees that each community school district should have the complete personnel powers that are recommended for positions below that title. Hiring by 30 to 60 different school districts of teachers and others could increase political, racial and religious interference in the selection process. It could create an unparalleled pool of patronage, which could effectively destroy the merit system, unless there are suitable central safeguards. We favor legislation that would allow the central

agency to delegate to district superintendents the right to hire teachers in a district, subject to such safeguards.

The proposals of the panel would result in fragmentation of the personnel procedure, permitting teachers to "shop around" for assignments to specific schools they desire. We believe that their recommendations would result in chaotic and divisive local recruiting and selection by these many school districts. The result would be a downgrading of standards in certain communities, and, even more damaging, an inequitable distribution of personnel among the districts. Moreover, we foresee the possibility that some districts will be unable to attract a sufficient number of qualified teachers. We also foresee an adverse effect on promotional opportunities and morale.

The panel proposes the elimination of written examinations for the selection and promotion of personnel. We have previously said that we believe that too many examinations fail to test the qualities most needed in the changing society and are surrounded by red tape and overly complex procedures. The recent change in the law affecting the Board of Examiners is already bringing some improvement. However, we believe with the panel that there is need for greater flexibility in bringing in new blood and that promotions should be made on the basis of experience and demonstrated achievement. We would favor legislation which would grant authority to the central agency over the nature of the examination process—whether written or otherwise.

III. SOME PRACTICAL OPERATING DIFFICULTIES

The recommendations of the Mayor's panel would set up two parallel school systems with many overlapping functions and duplicating responsibilities between school levels. For example:

High Schools. The difficulties inherent in this plan are well pointed up by what might happen to the Board's program for comprehensive high schools. Under the panel's proposals, an effective policy for reorganization of our high schools would not be possible. For example, if vocational education is to be provided, either the vocational high schools would have to be retained or each comprehensive high school would have to offer a full range of courses, which would be tremendously expensive. A large number of our academic high schools have special courses which serve pupils from many areas of the city. The local interests of districts could well result in the elimination of these courses, to the detriment of the pupils with special interests, aptitudes and talents.

Special Classes. Under the plan proposed, the central agency would have jurisdiction over special classes and for special pupils such as those with mental retardation and the handicapped. By and large, such classes draw their pupils from areas much wider than individual districts. However, such classes are organized in existing school buildings which would be under the direction of the community school boards. Obvious conflicts in supervision, responsibility, and space requirements are built into this overlapping organization between the central and community boards. Which children would secure priority of preference?

Curriculum. The plan envisages that curricula will be "determined" by each of the many districts. If it is intended that districts have real autonomy in this area, careful consideration would have to be given to such matters as pupil mobility and the need for articulation between school levels. We must make sure that the tens of thousands of children who move each year from one district to another, most of them in disadvantaged areas, are not penalized because of such mobility. High school students must continue to cross district lines and should have a common basic preparation. Because of these two factors, we see the need in New York City for a common curriculum which is subject to adaptation in each district on the basis of its special needs. In essence then, the central agency should develop the basic curriculum pattern and courses of study --thus avoiding duplication of effort. In addition, it should keep the districts informed of research and new developments in this vital area, as well as serve as a medium of exchange for desirable practices resulting from local adaptation.

Optional Services. Under the plan of the panel, community school boards would have the right to delegate to the central agency the performance of various services. A practical question arises —must the central agency maintain capability for providing services for all districts? And, if so, for how long and at what varying dates? We question whether it is feasible to have the central agency as well as 60 different district units maintain capabilities on such diverse subjects as staff recruitment, curriculum development, research, purchasing, data processing, business affairs, etc. Years of expert knowledge and detail are needed in these functions if waste and duplication are to be avoided.

Cost. As many as 60 community school boards would be distinct corporate bodies. Each would have responsibility for purchasing, curriculum, budget formulation, recruitment, zoning, textbook determination, relations with state and federal government agencies, and many other duties now done centrally. It is obvious that a substantially increased staff will be needed to handle each of these functions in each district. Although it might be possible to reduce some personnel at central headquarters (but not much because the central agency would be required to have services available for those community school boards that request them), there must necessarily be an additional cost of many millions of dollars. The potential magnitude of these costs is referred to in the section of the report entitled "Costs of Decentralization." Is it intended to increase the educational budget by that amount? If so, the problem would be only one of cost. However, if the same size fund is available, then such expenditures would cut into the educational programs now being provided for children.

Authority to Carry Out Responsibilities of the Central Agency. In certain areas the plan envisages the granting of various city-wide responsibilities to the central agency. Among these are the maintenance of state standards, integration, building maintenance, etc. However, it is not clear how the community school boards would be held responsible for implementing policies and decisions of the central agency in these vital areas. For example, although a quality incentive fund is available to encourage adherence to integration policies set by the central agency, in our opinion this does not constitute sufficient insurance to accomplish the purpose intended.

IV. TEMPORARY COMMISSION ON TRANSITION

A temporary commission on transition is proposed as a "joint venture" of the Board of Education and the Office of the Mayor for a three-year period. It would have operational functions. Specifically, the report provides that "under approved plans, the temporary commission staff may itself carry out certain operations, and it should have authority to direct the central staff of the school system, through the Superintendent of Schools, to carry out others."

The dispersal of operating authority, as between merging community school boards, the central Board of Education and the transitional committee, coupled with the increased role of the Mayor and the active operational role of the Commissioner of Education, will, we

fear, so diffuse responsibility as to create extremely serious problems.

V. CONCLUSION

As the report of the panel recognizes, a new structure by itself will not necessarily improve schools in all parts of the city. The report affirms that "it will not automatically provide insights into the uncharted terrain of the basic mechanisms of learning and teaching." Such insights are the essential ingredient for an effective educational program, especially for the disadvantaged child.

The Board of Education is committed to the principle of local involvement and decentralization of function in order to foster parent and community participation and greater flexibility of school operations. We favor more progress in these areas. However, on the basis of the Board's experience, we cannot agree with a number of the specific recommendations proposed by a majority of the panel to effectuate our common goals. Serious problems must arise in recasting, in one quick stroke, the largest educational system in the world.

We must be reasonably sure that a plan will be successful and do not feel sufficient assurance in the plan submitted. Rather than a rigidly timed and mandated set of procedures, we prefer a more deliberative process of movement and evaluation. Moreover, we believe there are constructive legislative alternatives that can achieve many of the same goals without as many dangers. We urge such alternatives in the best interests of all of the children of our city.

November 9, 1967

CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT—CITY OF NEW YORK

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